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# The First Drink

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The night swells around us.  
 Our voices, tense with lightning,  
 create a new silence.  
 Tree frogs surrender their bows,  
 crickets hush. Your shadow

emerges among the fireflies,  
 soft-edged, reflecting the moon.  
 I start, as if seeing you  
 for the first time, ask myself:  
 Who's the arrow and who's the swan?

### THE FIRST DRINK

My mother stands in the doorway,  
 always leaving. She thinks  
 I'm a woman. Her face shows this—  
 how odd. I'm four years old  
 or less. The scene: Grandma's  
 kitchen, my father, his lap, me.  
 The choice: him or her. My heart  
 empties soundlessly. I need her  
 but she never touches me.  
 The kitchen seems to shrink when she leaves  
 like some hot air balloon dying.

Objects take on life like that:  
street signs, trees. I hear everything  
scream. I'm careful with everything.  
The piano hurts when I touch it.  
The glass angel feels lonely  
when I leave the room. I can't bear  
the cries of animals or babies.  
I'm seven years old, careful  
not to crease my communion dress  
or bite the body of Christ. When they  
say the word sin, I believe them.

Late October: I bleed for the first time,  
ruin my Halloween costume.  
I want to lay my head in my father's  
lap, absorb his equilibrium,  
but he thinks I'm a woman now,  
screams at me to cover myself. His fear  
is an undertow that drags him away. The years  
grow between us like bad children.

I spend reckless weekends  
before an eternal candle and gilded wafer  
they call God, starve my flesh  
to fine points, hard planes.  
At sixteen, the first drink goes down  
like a flame: purifying, hot.  
I feel the answers flood my toes,  
the promise seize my brain  
like sunlight in a corner of hell.